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Operational activities for development

Joint Inspection Unit

Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the organizations of the United Nations system on the report entitled "Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals" (A/71/431).

The evaluation is one of two pilot evaluations conducted in accordance with the General Assembly policy for independent system-wide evaluation of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/68/658-E/2014/7). It was led by the Joint Inspection Unit in partnership with evaluation offices of United Nations system organizations. A significant number of stakeholders, including Member States, were also engaged.

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Summary

The evaluation undertaken by the Joint Inspection Unit examined the contribution of the United Nations system as a whole to strengthening national capacities for statistical data collection and analysis, as well as the use of statistics to support decision-making processes, policy development and accountability to civil society. It described, analysed and evaluated the importance and evolving status of national statistical capacity, the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system within the context of a larger international effort, the effectiveness and added value of what the United Nations system has done and the factors that explain its performance.

The evaluation recommended a number of strategic actions aimed at strengthening support for national statistical capacity development for data collection and analysis, with a particular emphasis on the use of statistics to guide decision-making for the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/71/431). The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by organizations of the United Nations system, which welcomed the report, supported its conclusions and accepted all of the recommendations.

I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled "Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals" (A/71/431), the Joint Inspection Unit, in partnership with evaluation offices of United Nations system organizations and with the advisory support of various stakeholders, examined the importance and evolving status of national statistical capacity, the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system within the context of a larger international effort, the effectiveness and added value of what the United Nations system has done and the factors that explain its role, positioning and performance. The evaluation makes recommendations for strategic actions aimed at enhancing system-wide coherence and impact and at ensuring that the United Nations system as a whole is efficiently and effectively responding to global, regional and country-level needs and priorities and achieving the internationally agreed development goals.

2. The evaluation covered the work of 30 United Nations system entities involved in statistical capacity development at various levels, working in over 100 programme countries. Evaluation findings were generated from a number of data collection methods, including 16 country studies, evaluations and reviews of the United Nations system at the country level (including United Nations Development Assistance Framework evaluations), global and regional evaluations, interviews with key stakeholders and data from various global data sources. The findings were validated through various stakeholder meetings, including side event presentations at the 2016 Economic and Social Council operational activities for development segment and at the forty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission. In addition, a validation survey on the findings of the evaluation was administered to users and producers of statistics in 130 programme countries.

II. General comments

3. Organizations acknowledge the importance of statistical capacity at the country level for the implementation of the sustainable development agenda and the need for changes in the way the United Nations system supports countries and enhances capacity. In that regard, they supported the recommendations made for changes for a more effective role for the United Nations system.

4. A large number of organizations were engaged in the evaluation in various forms and capacities in order to enhance validity and utility, while respecting measures taken by the Joint Inspection Unit to safeguard the independence of the evaluation.

5. Organizations appreciated that engagement. In their comments, some organizations indicated that their points had already been addressed in the evaluation, and thus they had no further comments and/or concurred with the overall findings, conclusions and recommendations made.

6. Organizations were pleased with the overall conclusion of the evaluation that the United Nations entities had made important contributions to the development of

national capacities for producing statistics. They also concurred with the conclusion on the critical role of statistics for informed policy decisions and the need to give priority to enhancing the use of statistics in the work of the United Nations system as an important dimension of their current work.

7. Organizations concurred with the conclusions regarding the challenges and complexities involved in the coordination and coherence of capacity development among the United Nations system organizations, and that the proposed greater alignment and coherence include alignment with the Statistics Division and the United Nations regional commissions while taking into consideration the full complexity of the various mandates and varying roles. This would also include coordination with other intergovernmental bodies such as the functional commissions or boards of specialized agencies. In that regard, it was suggested that Member States should consider expanding the membership of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to entities outside the Statistical Commission.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, should make national statistical capacity development a major strategic priority of the United Nations system entities addressing production, dissemination and use of official statistics, and should call on all Member States to redirect the financial resources necessary to support all three areas.

Organizations support this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, should reaffirm that the principal goal of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development is the use of national statistics for supporting the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, and in this regard, request United Nations system organizations to make all efforts to support achievement of this goal.

Organizations support this recommendation.

Recommendation 3

Executive heads of United Nations entities that work on national statistical capacity development should establish a network (a working group or task force) that will bring together the different entities' policy, programme and statistics departments in order to define how to better support more effective use of statistics by national stakeholders to achieve national development goals and should develop system-wide guidance for United Nations system entities on this issue.

Organizations support this recommendation, and some organizations welcomed the opportunity to become a member of the suggested network, once established.

Recommendation 4

The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, to develop a strategic framework for the next five years regarding United Nations system integrated support for national statistical capacity development at the global, regional and country levels, setting out the roles and areas of work for entities at all three levels.

Organizations agreed with the recommendation and on the need to implement it, leveraging existing capacities and mandates. Some organizations noted that the successful development and implementation of such a strategic framework should include: (a) the establishment of clear performance criteria and benchmarks for strengthening national institutional capacity; (b) mechanisms that would facilitate implementation through the various United Nations agencies; and (c) the provision of adequate resources. It was also noted that its development should be led by the existing coordination mechanisms, such as the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the group of United Nations chief statisticians.

Recommendation 5

The General Assembly should ensure in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review that national statistical capacity development is a strategic area of support for all United Nations country teams, recognizing that the role will vary significantly between countries as determined by the national authorities.

Organizations support this recommendation.